



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Mark Twain National Forest
Potosi – Fredericktown
Ranger District

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File Code: 1950

Date: September 30, 2003

Dear Neighbor,

INTRODUCTION

This scoping letter is being sent out to solicit comments on this proposal that would utilize prescribed fire in the Bearpaw/John's Creek area. The primary purpose of the proposed Bearpaw Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project is to reduce impacts of future wildfires through the use of prescribed burning to reduce fuel loadings. In addition, repeated future prescribed burning will improve and maintain an open woodland habitat character.

LOCATION

The Bear Paw/John's Creek Hazardous Fuels Reduction project area is located on the Potosi/Fredericktown Ranger District in Washington County, approximately 9 air miles southwest of Shirley, Missouri. The legal description is: T36N, R1W, Sections 16, 17, 21-23, 26, and 27. The project borders private property to the west (see attached map).

BACKGROUND

The Mark Twain National Forest is an ecosystem whose plants and animals have adapted to periodic occurrence of fire. Hazardous fuel conditions create the potential for severe forest fires that could have a significant effect on the health and safety of the public and firefighters in the area. The ability to respond to and safely suppress potential fires is severely decreased by large fuel accumulations. Multiple, periodic prescribed burning treatments on an as-needed basis over the course of the next 5 to 10 years would significantly reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire to public and private lands and property, and the physical safety of nearby residents and wildland firefighters.

The Bear Paw/John's Creek project area is made up largely of oak-hickory hardwood stands intermixed with oak-pine stands. The age and size of these stands vary from young growing stock to mature sawtimber. Historically, timber stands of the Bearpaw/John's Creek area were maintained by fire and were much more open than today. However, after years of suppression and natural succession, these stands are denser and less resilient to fire and disease. In 1993 the Forest Service re-introduced fire to 194 acres of the Bearpaw/John's Creek project area landscape. This was done to reduce hazardous fuels and to gradually create an open woodland habitat. Prescribed burn treatments were again implemented on these 194 acres in 1994, 1998, and 2000. Such repetitive treatments have proven successful. These 194 acres are within the proposed project area, and would be burned again if this project is approved.



FOREST PLAN DIRECTION

The 1986 Mark Twain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), as amended, provides general guidance and direction for the Proposed Action. The Bearpaw/John's Creek area is located within Forest Plan Management Area (MA) 4.1. The direction for MA 4.1 is to "emphasize the management of shortleaf pine in its natural range" (Forest Plan IV-125). Prescribed fire is an acceptable tool within this management prescription, and has been used in this project area in previous years to meet resource management objectives.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The primary purpose of this project is to reduce hazardous fuels through prescribed burning in an effort to reduce adverse impact of future wildfires. Following the initial hazardous fuel reduction burn, additional burning will be conducted as needed in future years to improve and maintain an open woodland habitat. Such repetitive burning will maintain a lowered possible threat of damaging wildfire by keeping fuel loadings at a minimum.

PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action is to reduce hazardous fuels on approximately 996 acres in Washington County, Missouri, through prescribed burning. The project area will be monitored and further prescribed fire treatments will be conducted as needed to maintain an open woodland habitat.

DECISION TO BE MADE

The decision to be made is whether or not to implement the Bearpaw Hazardous Fuel Reduction Project encompassing approximately 996 acres in Washington County, Missouri, to reduce hazardous fuels and improve/maintain an open woodland habitat.

HOW TO COMMENT

Please send your comments to the address above by October 31, 2003. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection.

If you have any questions or need more information, please contact Chris Woods at the above address or phone number. Comments or requests for information may also be sent via the Internet to: comments-eastern-mark-twain-potosi@fs.fed.us

Sincerely,

Katherine W. Stuart

KATHERINE W. STUART
District Ranger

Enclosure